

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF WEST VIRGINIA**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

v.

Criminal Action No. 1:14-cr-66-3

**ERIC HOLT,
Defendant.**

**OPINION/ REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
CONCERNING PLEA OF GUILTY IN FELONY CASE**

This matter has been referred to the undersigned Magistrate Judge by the District Court for purposes of conducting proceedings pursuant to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11. Defendant, Eric Holt, in person and by counsel, Belinda Haynie, appeared before me on November 17, 2014. The Government appeared by Assistant United States Attorney Shawn Morgan. The Court determined that Defendant was prepared to enter a plea of "Guilty" to the lesser-included offense from Count Three of the Indictment.

The Court proceeded with the Rule 11 proceeding by first placing Defendant under oath.

The Court inquired of Defendant whether he was a citizen of the United States. Defendant responded that he is a citizen. The undersigned asked Defendant whether he understood that if he were not a citizen of the United States, by pleading guilty to a felony charge he would be subject to deportation at the conclusion of any sentence; that he would be denied future entry into the United States; and that he would be denied citizenship if he ever applied for it. Defendant stated that he understood.

The Court determined that Defendant's plea was pursuant to a written plea agreement, and asked the Government to tender the original to the Court. The Court asked counsel for the Government if the agreement was the sole agreement offered to Defendant. The Government responded that a prior plea agreement had been offered to Defendant. That plea agreement called

for Defendant to plead to Count Three, which charges him with aiding and abetting the distribution of cocaine base within 1,000 feet of a protected location. Counsel for the Government indicated that the instant plea agreement was more favorable to Defendant. Defendant confirmed that the instant agreement was more favorable and that he had discussed both agreements with his counsel. The Court asked counsel for the Government to summarize the written plea agreement. Defendant stated that the agreement as summarized by the Government was correct and complied with his understanding of the agreement. The Court **ORDERED** the written plea agreement filed and found the requirements of Missouri v. Frye, 132 S. Ct. 1399 (2012) to be satisfied.

The Court next inquired of Defendant concerning his understanding of his right to have an Article III Judge hear the entry of his guilty plea and his understanding of the difference between an Article III Judge and a Magistrate Judge. Defendant thereafter stated in open court that he voluntarily waived his right to have an Article III Judge hear his plea and voluntarily consented to the undersigned Magistrate Judge hearing his plea, and tendered to the Court a written Waiver of Article III Judge and Consent To Enter Guilty Plea Before Magistrate Judge, which waiver and consent was signed by Defendant and countersigned by Defendant's counsel and was concurred in by the signature of the Assistant United States Attorney appearing.

Upon consideration of the sworn testimony of Defendant, as well as the representations of his counsel and the representations of the Government, the Court finds that the oral and written waiver of Article III Judge and consent to enter guilty plea before a Magistrate Judge was freely and voluntarily given and the written waiver and consent was freely and voluntarily executed by Defendant, Eric Holt, only after having had his rights fully explained to him and having a full understanding of those rights through consultation with his counsel, as well as through questioning

by the Court. The Court **ORDERED** the written Waiver and Consent to Enter Guilty Plea before a Magistrate Judge filed and made part of the record.

The undersigned then reviewed with Defendant the lesser-included offense from Count Three of the Indictment and the elements the Government would have to prove, charging him with aiding and abetting the distribution of cocaine base, in violation of 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(a)(1), 841(b)(1)(C), and 18 U.S.C. § 2. The undersigned then reviewed with Defendant the statutory penalties applicable to an individual adjudicated guilty of the lesser felony charge contained in Count Three of the Indictment, the impact of the sentencing guidelines on sentencing in general, and inquired of Defendant as to his competency to proceed with the plea hearing. From said review the undersigned Magistrate Judge determined Defendant understood the nature of the charges pending against him and understood the possible statutory maximum sentence which could be imposed upon his conviction or adjudication of guilty on the lesser-included offense from Count Three was imprisonment for a term of not more than twenty (20) years; understood that a fine of not more than \$1,000,000.00 could be imposed; understood that both fine and imprisonment could be imposed; understood he would be subject to a period of at least three (3) years of supervised release; and understood the Court would impose a special mandatory assessment of \$100.00 for the felony conviction payable on or before the date of sentencing. Defendant also understood that his sentence could be increased if he had a prior firearm offense, violent felony conviction, or prior drug conviction. He also understood he might be required by the Court to pay the costs of his incarceration and supervised release.

The undersigned also reviewed with Defendant his waiver of appellate rights as follows:

Ct. Do you understand that ordinarily you have the right to appeal your conviction and sentence to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals provided you give notice of intent to appeal within 14 days?

Def. Yes.

Ct. Do you also understand that you may file a writ of habeas corpus type motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255 collaterally attacking or challenging the sentence and how it's being carried out?

Def. Yes.

Ct. Under your plea agreement, you are giving up your right to appeal your conviction and sentence, is that correct?

Def. Yes, sir.

Ct. Under your plea agreement, you're giving up your right to collaterally attack or challenge the sentence and how it's being carried out by filing that writ of habeas corpus motion, is that correct?

Def. Yes, sir.

Ct. The only rights with respect to your habeas motion that you keep is if after today you discover that there's been some prosecutorial misconduct or some ineffective assistance of counsel, is that correct?

Def. Yes, sir.

Ct. Do you know of any prosecutorial misconduct as you sit here today?

Def. No, sir.

Ct. Do you know of any ineffective assistance of counsel as you sit here today?

Def. No, sir.

Ct. Did you intend to give up your right of appeal and your right of collateral attack as set forth in your plea agreement?

Def. Yes, sir.

Ct. Has anything about your understanding of that paragraph in your agreement changed since you signed it and today?

Def. No, sir.

From the foregoing colloquy the undersigned determined that Defendant understood his appellate rights and knowingly gave up those rights pursuant to the conditions contained in the written plea agreement.

The undersigned Magistrate Judge further examined Defendant relative to his knowledgeable and voluntary execution of the written plea bargain agreement, and determined the entry into said written plea bargain agreement was both knowledgeable and voluntary on the part of Defendant. The undersigned then inquired of Defendant regarding his understanding of the written plea agreement. Defendant stated he understood the terms of the written plea agreement and also stated that it contained the whole of his agreement with the Government and no promises or representations were made to him by the Government other than those terms contained in the written plea agreement.

The undersigned Magistrate Judge further inquired of Defendant, his counsel, and the Government as to the non-binding recommendations and stipulation contained in the written plea bargain agreement and determined that Defendant understood, with respect to the plea bargain agreement and to Defendant's entry of a plea of guilty to the felony charge contained in Count Three of the Indictment, the undersigned Magistrate Judge would write the subject Report and

Recommendation and would further order a pre-sentence investigation report be prepared by the probation officer attending the District Court. The undersigned advised the Defendant that the District Judge would adjudicate the Defendant guilty of the lesser-included offense charged in Count Three of the Indictment. Only after the District Court had an opportunity to review the pre-sentence investigation report, would the District Court make a determination as to whether to accept or reject any recommendation or stipulation contained within the plea agreement or pre-sentence report. The undersigned reiterated to the Defendant that the District Judge may not agree with the recommendations or stipulation contained in the written agreement. The undersigned Magistrate Judge further advised Defendant, in accord with Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11, that in the event the District Court Judge refused to follow the non-binding recommendations or stipulation contained in the written plea agreement and/or sentenced him to a sentence which was different from that which he expected, he would not be permitted to withdraw his guilty plea. Defendant and his counsel each acknowledged their understanding and Defendant maintained his desire to have his plea of guilty accepted.

Defendant also understood that his actual sentence could not be calculated until after a pre-sentence report was prepared and a sentencing hearing conducted. The undersigned also advised, and Defendant stated that he understood, that the Sentencing Guidelines are no longer mandatory, and that, even if the District Judge did not follow the Sentencing Guidelines or sentenced him to a higher sentence than he expected, he would not have a right to withdraw his guilty plea. Defendant further stated his attorney showed him how the advisory guideline chart worked but did not promise him any specific sentence at the time of sentencing. Defendant stated that he understood his attorney could not predict or promise him what actual sentence he would receive from the sentencing judge at the sentencing hearing. Defendant further understood there was no parole in the federal system,

although he may be able to earn institutional good time, and that good time was not controlled by the Court, but by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The parties agreed that the Government would present a proffer to establish an independent basis in fact for Defendant's plea to the lesser-included offense from Count Three. The Government proffered that on October 9, 2012, a confidential informant ("CI") made a digitally recorded controlled buy of cocaine base. On that date, co-defendant Joseph Green directed the CI to the parking lot of the Dollar General in Clarksburg, West Virginia, within the Northern District of West Virginia. Green arrived at the parking lot in a vehicle that was driven by Defendant. The CI approached the vehicle, and Green indicated that they would need to take the CI's money and go get the crack cocaine. Green and Defendant drove away with \$150.00 in pre-recorded funds. When they returned, Green provided the cocaine base to the CI. The substance was lab tested and confirmed to contain 0.51 grams of cocaine base.

Defendant stated he heard, understood, and did not disagree with the Government's proffer. The undersigned United States Magistrate Judge concludes the lesser-included offense charged in Count Three of the Indictment are supported by an independent basis in fact concerning each of the essential elements of such offense. That independent basis is provided by the Government's proffer.

Thereupon, Defendant, Eric Holt, with the consent of his counsel, Belinda Haynie, proceeded to enter a verbal plea of **GUILTY** to the lesser-included offense charged in Count Three of the Indictment.

Upon consideration of all of the above, the undersigned Magistrate Judge finds that Defendant is fully competent and capable of entering an informed plea; Defendant is aware of and understood his right to have an Article III Judge hear and accept his plea and elected to voluntarily

consent to the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge hearing his plea; Defendant understood the charges against him, not only as to the Indictment as a whole, but in particular as to the lesser-included offense contained in Count Three of the Indictment; Defendant understood the consequences of his plea of guilty, in particular the maximum statutory penalty to which he would be exposed for the lesser-included offense from Count Three; Defendant made a knowing and voluntary plea of guilty to the lesser-included offense charged in Count Three of the Indictment; and Defendant's plea is independently supported by the Government's proffer which provides, beyond a reasonable doubt, proof of each of the essential elements of the charge to which Defendant has pled guilty.

The undersigned Magistrate Judge therefore **RECOMMENDS** Defendant's plea of guilty to the lesser-included offense from Count Three of the Indictment herein be accepted conditioned upon the Court's receipt and review of this Report and Recommendation.

The undersigned further directs that a pre-sentence investigation report be prepared by the adult probation officer assigned to this case.

Subsequent to the change of plea hearing, counsel for Defendant presented the Court with a copy of Defendant's paystub. Counsel proffered that on his financial affidavit, Defendant had included his net pay rather than his gross pay. Upon review of Defendant's paystub, the undersigned finds that after living expenses, primary deductions, and child support deductions, Defendant has approximately \$1,500.00 remaining for other expenses and/or for reimbursement of the fees of court-appointed counsel. Accordingly, the undersigned **RECOMMENDS** that the District Judge consider whether Defendant should be required to reimburse the costs of court-appointed counsel over time.

Defendant is released pursuant to the Order Setting Conditions of Release previously entered.

Any party may, within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy of this Report and Recommendation, file with the Clerk of the Court written objections identifying the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objection is made, and the basis for such objection. A copy of such objections should also be submitted to the Honorable Irene M. Keeley, United States District Judge. Failure to timely file objections to the Report and Recommendation set forth above will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of this Court based upon such report and recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).

The Clerk of the Court is directed to send a copy of this Report and Recommendation to counsel of record.

Respectfully submitted this 17th day of November, 2014.

John S. Kaull
JOHN S. KAULL
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE